

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday 16 June 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor Longhi (Chair)
Councillor Nazir (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Flower
Councillor J Phillips
Councillor Sarohi
Councillor Towe
Councillor Turner
Councillor Yasin

Portfolio holders present Councillor Griffiths, Finance and Personnel

Officers present Tim Johnson, Executive Director- Regeneration
James Walsh, Assistant Director- Finance
Sarah Homer, Assistant Director- Transformation
John Pryce-Jones, Corporate Performance Manager-
Customer Focus and Intelligence
Colin Teasdale, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

01/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Cook

02/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

The following substitution(s) to the panel were submitted for the duration of the meeting:-

- Delete: Councillor Bird
- Substitute: Councillor Towe

03/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

04/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Cllr Longhi informed the panel that he had agreed with the scrutiny office that in addition to the public minutes that would be agreed at each meeting, members would receive an additional column referencing agreed actions along with an update on progress with these on the night.

Resolved

1. That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record (annexed)
2. That at future panel meetings, members receive additional

information updating them on actions agreed at the previous meeting

05/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The panel noted the training opportunities as previously circulated.

06/08 FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan as at 6 June 2008 was submitted (annexed): Members noted the improvements to the level of detail contained in the forward plan and felt that it struck the right balance between enough information to understand the issue and not so much as to be overwhelming.

The Chair also reminded members of the changes to the Panel's remit for this year and the extra flexibility this gave them when looking at items for consideration on the forward plan.

The panel noted the Sustainable Community Strategy but felt that they had already had a significant amount of detail on this and did not need any more involvement at this stage, though they did wish to inform officers of their desire for updates to be brought back to the panel if there were any significant changes.

Members also commented on the Area Based Grant that was due to go to Cabinet for a decision on the 16 July 2008. They felt it was important that, as members of the corporate panel with overall responsibility for scrutinising the resources of the council it was important that they had a good understanding of the external funding arenas and the impact of these on the council's budget. It was agreed that a briefing note be circulated to members to bring them up to speed on this issue.

Members expressed an interest in the item 'Procurement of a new residual waste treatment plant' due to their work around procurement within the Council. They were informed that the Neighbourhood's Scrutiny and Performance Panel had already agreed to pick up this issue and were satisfied that this panel could report back to the Corporate Panel should any issues to do with the procurement process be identified.

Members asked questions around the Oracle Finance and Procurement Transformation project and were interested to find out more detail. As this item was going to Cabinet on 16 July it was agreed to circulate a briefing note to members prior to this and that there was also scope for an ongoing dialogue between officers and the panel on the implementation of the project after the cabinet decision had been made.

Members expressed an interest in the Corporate Asset Management Plan, due to its impact on resources. They were informed that the Neighbourhood's Panel had elected not to look at that this year but felt that as it had clear implications that fell within their remit that they would like more information. It was agreed that a briefing note would be

requested from the Executive Director for Neighbourhoods, to be circulated to members prior to the 16 July Cabinet meeting.

Members requested that an item on the Energy Supply Contract, scheduled to go to Cabinet on 17 September, be brought to Scrutiny prior to this date so members could receive more information and satisfy themselves that the Council was getting the best possible value for its supply contract.

Resolved

That the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

- 1. Request that the Director of the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership brings back to Scrutiny the Sustainable Community Strategy only if there are any significant developments**
- 2. Agree that a briefing note should be circulated to members on the Area Based Grant**
- 3. Request that the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel report back to the Corporate Panel if they find any significant issues with the procurement process for the residual waste treatment plan.**
- 4. Agree that a briefing note should be distributed on the Oracle Finance and Transformation Project**
- 5. Request that the Executive Director for Neighbourhoods circulates a briefing note to members on the Corporate Asset Management Plan**
- 6. Agree that an item on the Energy Supply Contract is added to the work programme for consideration by the panel prior to going to Cabinet on 17 September.**

07/08 Work Programme 2008/09

The Chair introduced the report previously distributed to members on proposed items for inclusion in the year's work programme, included carry over items from last year and new items suggested by officers (annexed.) He then invited Officers to deliver a presentation (annexed) outlining the detail around some of the issues identified and invited questions to officers once this was completed.

The panel asked officers if Job Evaluation, highlighted in the presentation, included Single Status and if so if there was a national agreed timeframe of when this should be in place by. Officers informed the panel that did this included Single Status and, whilst there had been timescales laid down originally by central government, they were satisfied with progress so far and that they were in the pack of other authorities in terms of progressing.

The Panel agreed that all carry over items identified from the last meeting

should be included in this year's work programme.

Officers requested from the panel more information on what they expected to see on the carry over item on the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Service as they were not clear from last year what focus the panel wished to take with this.

Members commented that they wanted to gain an understanding of where the council was with regard to investment in technology and how ICT underpins the transformation programme. They were also interested in what software packages were currently in use, both in terms of bespoke programmes for specific uses and the more general desktop software and whether they could be getting better value for money from these. Members also commented on Open Source Software and whether this free service could be utilised in some areas to make cashable savings for the Council.

Officers suggested that an initial overview presentation was brought to the panel, outlining where the authority was in terms of ICT, which members could then use to inform which areas they wanted greater detail on if necessary.

The Chair requested that this was brought at the same time as the briefing on the Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) so they could combine the two items.

Members then moved on to look at the new items that had been suggested by officers for inclusion on the work programme.

Members agreed that they were interested in more information on both the Corporate Assessment Findings and the transition from CPA to CAA and requested that a briefing be brought to the panel on both of these at the same time. They requested a particular focus on why the Council had only scored a 2 for the capacity theme (down from 3) and what steps were being taken to address this, and also on the specific role members would be expected to play within the new CAA.

Members expressed a desire to have an input into the budget role of scrutiny and voiced their frustrations with the process from last year, particularly with regard to the delay in knowing the financial settlement from central government which meant they were looking at proposals without having a full picture. They also wished to see more of an overview of the budget so they knew where money was being spent, rather than just detail in proposed savings and investments.

Officers commented that they were keen for this process to work well and add value and so would welcome feedback from members on what information they wanted, when they wanted it and what format they wanted it in. It was important that officers knew the right level of detail to provide to members.

It was agreed that officers would develop some models and bring these back to the Panel for comment.

Members were keen to look at Member Development, as highlighted in the report and presentation. They felt that in recent years some of the enthusiasm around development had been lost and they wanted to see more choice and more aspirational opportunities, rather than just a focus on getting everyone up to the same basic level of understanding. It was agreed that the panel should receive a report from the Member Development Steering Group on what work was currently being carried out.

Members commented on the three services that had been identified by officers for review using the Value for Money toolkit that had been developed by the panel 2 years ago for use in Revenues and Benefits. Members were keen to follow this through for all three areas- Payroll and Pensions, SHAW, and the Communications Unit- and wanted to look at Payroll and Pensions first.

Officers informed the Panel that though the report indicated that there were no set timescales that would influence when they should look at the Communications Unit, this would in fact be influenced by a recent CMT report commissioning a review of communications across the authority, including promotion of 'Walsall the Place.'

Members agreed to reform the Procurement Working Group and the Chair opened up membership to the panel after indicating that he again wanted to be involved. Councillors Sarohi, Towe, Turner and Flower expressed an interest and it was also advised that Councillors Bird and Hughes, who had both been members of the group, were also likely to be interested and should be invited. The Chair also indicated that, as procurement was an issue that had implications across a range of work being undertaken by all panels, membership should also be opened up to any other interested individuals from other scrutiny and performance panels

Resolved

That the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

- 1. Agree to the inclusion in their work programme for 2008/09 the following carry over items from last year:**
 - **Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Funding**
 - **Safety and Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) monitoring**
 - **Electronic Document Management System**
 - **Information Communication Technology System**
 - **Welfare Rights Service**
 - **Job Evaluation;**
- 2. Agree that the Assistant Director for Strategic Transformation brings a presentation to a future panel meeting outlining the**

Authority's current position in terms of ICT and that this should include information on areas for the potential roll out of EDMS;

3. Agree to include the following new items on their work programme for 2008/09:
 - LAA Monitoring
 - Corporate Assessment Findings
 - Transition from CPA to CAA
 - Budget role of scrutiny
 - Member Development
 - Payroll and Pensions
 - Safety, Health and Well-Being Service (SHAW)
 - Communications;
4. Agree that a report be brought to the panel outlining the findings of the recent Corporate Assessment findings and actions being taken to address weaknesses, along with an overview of the transition from CPA to CAA;
5. Agree that the Assistant Director for Finance bring to a future panel meeting an outline of various models for budget scrutiny to inform discussion around this;
6. Agree that the Member Development Steering Group be requested to produce a report for the Panel updating them on work currently being carried out with regard to member development;
7. Agree to use the VfM Toolkit to carry out a service review of Payroll and Pensions, SHAW and Communications, with Payroll and Pensions first;
8. Request that the Executive Director for Regeneration, report back with regard to timings affecting the review of the communications unit so that this can be effectively worked into the programme;
9. Agree to reform the Procurement Working Group, with membership to include Councillors Longhi, Sarohi, Towe, Turner and Flower with an invitation opened up wider to other scrutiny members and specific invites to the two members on last year's group not present at the meeting (Councillors Bird and E Hughes).

09/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 22 July 2008

The meeting terminated at 7.20pm.